

NO WATER, NO DIXON MELONS!

The end is near, no doubt about it, Dixon Melons is just about history. Soon it will be no more.

Dixon Melons has been in business in Western Montana for 24 years commercially. We grew all the local melons and expanded the operation as the years went by. My wife Joey and I employed and partnered with our family, including sons, daughters, cousins, nephews, and grandparents. We also employ up to 35 local individuals as seasonal laborers as well as in our retail sales. Local kids, both tribal and non-tribal have worked for us steadily over the years.

Josh Carter, an agricultural consultant that runs field trials for the large seed company named Keith Williams, works specifically in the Northwest Region. Josh and I spoke about the water quota necessary to grow my melon crop. Josh confirmed that I am using my water very efficiently with our drip system. Drip irrigation is state of the art for vine crop production. I asked him about the 1.4 acre feet maximum of irrigation water proposed by the Water Compact Commission that includes the CSKT, Montana State, and my local representatives the Flathead Joint Board of Control. After consulting with industry irrigation professionals, Josh's initial advice shocked me. His advice was that I should relocate to a farm where I would have an adequate supply of irrigation water for the Dixon Melons. Josh informed me that 1.4 acre feet would not nearly be enough for a successful harvest. In other words, Dixon Melons would be no more.

According to Imperial County Extension Service Bulletins, melons require a minimum of three (3) acre feet of water in order to produce a high quality crop. If we were to grow Dixon Melons on the maximum amount of water that the Water Commission insists is adequate, we would have vines with, at best, deformed, half grown watermelon, honeydew, and cantaloupe. In other words it would not be possible.

Over the years our business has survived grasshopper onslaughts and late frosts, hail, thieves, and alfalfa beetles, but never have we been deprived of a consistent source of good irrigation water. We are not the only productive producers that require ample water. Truck farms in this area and productive hay operations also require much more than a 1.4 acre foot maximum. It is likely that, if the current Water Proposals are passed for the Flathead Irrigation Project, there will be a number of farmers out of business. The proposed water Farm Turnout Allowance that is being forced on the producers in this area seems to be designed to put the local farms out of business. Either that or the data that the Water Commission has based its recommendations on is totally flawed. No entity, whether it is the State of Montana, the CSKT, or the Joint Board of Control, should be able to dictate if I can grow my crop, the same crop that I have grown for over 24 years. Who is actually benefiting from taking water from producers and reallocating it to go down the river to be leased somewhere else? It is certainly not our family, the people that have used the water and paid for it for over 24 years. This proposed water agreement must be revised to accommodate local farming. Please call your Joint Board of Control and ask them to truly represent the irrigators in all negotiations. The JBC needs to use collected, on site data to make any firm decisions about my farm and others, based on soil and possible drought conditions.

Have you ever had a bite of our Dixon Melons? If so, you must know that we pride ourselves on a quality, sweet, vine ripened melon. No water no melons.

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